

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### Partisan commissioners?

On March 31, Columbia County Commissioners will hold a public hearing in St. Helens to look at making the position of commissioner a nonpartisan office. It's never been clear to us why a position meant to serve all county residents was still partisan. Whether Republican or Democratic, commissioners have always served the entire populace, not just the portion of the county population that is of the same political party.

The election coming up on May 18 includes six candidates seeking to replace County Commissioner Rita Bernhard, who is retiring. Four of the candidates are registered Democrats and two are registered Republicans.

If the position is made nonpartisan, the May 18 election would be the last with a primary by party. It would be nice to be able to vote for the candidate judged best for all the county, not just the best one on your party's ballot.

Good job, commissioners, in bringing this up.

More about each of the candidates for commissioner in the April issues. The ballots are being sent out on April 30.

### Use of executive session

Vernonia's City Council held an executive session on March 15 that was improper (to use a nicer word than illegal). Some of those in the session had every reason to know better, since they were also present at an improper executive session a few years ago, citing the same reason. At least two council members, the mayor, and the city's recorder were there the last time. The same night, March 15, another lawsuit was discussed in open session. Did they try to put this one behind closed doors because it involved the Police Department?

Newspapers take Oregon's open meeting laws seriously. Why? That's our job. Our job is to hold government accountable. There are valid reasons (such as real estate negotiations) for councils to be able to hold some, but very few, discussions outside of the public ear. When executive sessions are used lawfully, it's our job NOT to report on them. When they are used unlawfully, it's our job TO report on them. See the city council story on page 5 for details.

### Like the March 4 cartoon?

The editorial cartoon in the March 4 issue triggered a letter (see page 3) from a reader who felt there was deceitful intent. On the other hand, a phone call came in from another reader telling us this cartoon was the best ever. That reader is framing it and sending a copy to President Obama. Such an interesting difference of opinion.



### Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



Ah, spring is in the air and in even numbered years that means...we are about to be hammered with political ads!

Locally, with Rita Bernhard retiring at the end of her term from Position 2 on the Columbia County Board of Commissioners, there's a pretty full roster

of those who will be trying to replace her.

Two Republicans have filed for Position 2:

Terry Luttrell, of St. Helens, is in his second term on the board of the Port of St. Helens and also serves on the county planning commission. He is pastor at the Columbia Christian Center in St. Helens, and has lived in several different regions of Oregon.

Glenn Dorschler, served 14 years as a councilman and mayor of Scappoose. A former pastor, he is now on the nursing staff at St. Vincent Hospital. His primary concerns are economic growth, jobs and public safety in the county.

Four Democrats have filed for Position 2:

Henry Heimuller, of St. Helens, is coordinator of Columbia County Rider transit system, and has served on many governmental boards. He is a paramedic and worked more than 22 years with Metro West Ambulance service. Not surprisingly, he is interested in improving public transportation.

Russ Moon, a Rainier city councilor, believes

the county can do more for economic development through incentives for both big and small businesses.

Judith Taylor, also a Rainier city councilor, cites her experience as a small business owner, president of the Rainier Chamber of Commerce and member of the council.

Shawna Sykes, of Scappoose, has resigned from her position with the Oregon Employment Department to run for the county commission. She has served on numerous public committees and is particularly concerned about increasing family wage jobs in the county.

The winners of the Democratic and Republican primary election, in May, will face each other in the November general election.

In the only other Columbia County offices up for election, incumbents Sue Poling, assessor; clerk Elizabeth "Betty" Huser, and district attorney Stephen Atchison, are all running unopposed.

City of Vernonia elections will also be held in November, but there is no primary election for these nonpartisan positions. On the ballot will be the mayoral position and two council seats, currently held by Cindy Ball and Brett Costley.

Anyone wanting to run for city positions must be a registered voter within the city limits, and file nomination papers between June 17 and August 12, 2010. The nomination papers must be accompanied with either a \$10 fee, or a petition with the signatures of 25 registered voters within the city. See city recorder Joann Glass for a packet of information and forms.